

Why might a child not speak in setting?

Quiet children

- There is nothing wrong with a child being quiet and some people are just more quiet by nature. Some children are quiet because they are shy.

Low or High profile Situational Mutism/Selective Mutism (SM)

- Some children are so anxious about speaking in some situations that they develop a phobia and become unable to speak at all – High Profile SM
- Low profile SM children speak when prompted to but won't initiate interaction with certain people or in certain situations

Speech, Language, and Communication Needs/Difficulties (SLCN)

- There is a huge range of what is “normal” when children are very young and some children might have delayed language skills but catch up and become brilliant communicators as older children and adults
- Others might have a persistent language problem, difficulties with speaking clearly, or another communication problem
- It is important for parents and settings to talk to each other - to investigate if there are concerns at home as well as setting

A “Silent Period”

- It is common for children to have a period of silence when entering a new environment and when this happens for bilingual children this is often called a “silent period”. If this lasts for more than one month, this should be investigated further. Bilingual children are at greater risk of developing selective mutism, where the silence becomes entrenched.
- Parents should continue speaking the languages they feel most comfortable using with their child

Advice for all children

- The advice in this pack will help children including those who at risk of SM, but also those who are a little shy, learning the language, or just settling in... in other words all children will benefit from these techniques!

Confused or not sure?

- Ask us for advice at one of our virtual advice sessions
www.buckshealthcare.nhs.uk/cyp/therapy/



Selective Mutism: Information poster for settings

There are signs of an increasing number of children who talk happily at home but not in other environments and situations. These children need a careful approach because well-meaning attempts to make them talk can make the situation worse! This can become a serious phobia with long term implications.

You can turn this worrying trend around!

1) Be positive and reassuring

When you notice a child being silent, have a quiet chat. Say you know talking is tricky at the moment, but don't worry because it will get easier! They don't have to talk straight away. Concentrate on having fun and it will gradually get easier to have a go.

2) Build confidence

Focus on building their ability to do non-speaking activities. Give them lots of specific praise and smiles. Do things with them, not for them.

3) Gradually facilitate speech

When the child gestures, respond as if they spoke. Offer choices between two things. Don't ask direct questions, instead chat in the style of running commentary.

4) Seek advice

If a child is silent for more than 6 weeks, contact a speech and language therapist

Please do:

- Accept any means of communication
- Encourage all children to use gestures such as waving greetings or hands up to answer the register
- Make sure parents let a child know if and when they're leaving and that they *will be back later*
- Make comments on what they're doing
- Encourage activities that involve movement or noise/music making.
- Encourage activities that involve talking or singing in unison
- Praise joining in rather than speaking

Please don't:

- Pretend not to understand
- Force the child to say hello/bye and please/thank you etc.
- Advise parents "just slip out when they're not looking"
- Ask lots of questions
- Talk negatively about the child and their silence in their hearing
- Bribe or cajole
- React too much when they *do* speak
- Pressure a child to "join in"
- Do things for them
- Be hurt that the child doesn't speak to you

Suitable children's books:

Penguin by Polly Dunbar • Little by Little by Amber Stewart • Lamb says Boo! By Katherine Sully

For more information see:

- SMIRA www.selectivemutism.org.uk
- Supporting Quiet Children: Exciting Ideas and Activities to Help 'Reluctant Talkers' Become 'Confident Talkers' – Maggie Johnson and Michael Jones (Lawrence Educational)

